

# *Vision*



Published by the School of Philosophy (Auckland) Inc for enjoyment and communication  
Issue 45 April 2026

The School 'Vision' publication began in November 2000 offering students the opportunity in their writings and contributions to convey a sense of looking beyond the boundaries of the physical world and into the subtle and spiritual realms.

Contributions for the next issue are always welcome.

Galaxy photograph on covers: Pexels (David Kopacz)

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## Enquiry

- Enquiry into the spiritual world with the acquired light of knowledge brings the divine world within one's vision. (*Conversations* 82:1.1)
- The action of seeking for truth, knowledge or information concerning something. (*Shorter Oxford Dictionary*)
- जिज्ञासम् (jijñāsasva) do thou desire to know, crave to know. (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 3.1.1)
- आत्मविचार (Ātmavicāra) enquiry into the nature of the Self. (*Grimes*)
- Enquiry about Brahman starts after action (कर्म karma) and devotion (उपासना upāsana). Karma is for cleansing the being and upāsana is for concentration and attention. (*Conversations* 80:5.3)
- Those who have the good fortune of their own grace आत्मकृपा (ātmakṛpā, inspired for truth and freedom) will make proper use of शास्त्रकृपा (śāstrakṛpā, grace of scriptures) and गुरुकृपा (gurukṛpā, grace of a teacher). (*Conversations* 99:1.3)

# What is Spiritual Enquiry?

Spiritual enquiry, often called self-enquiry in some traditions, means investigating the nature of reality, the self, and consciousness through direct reflection and experience rather than through belief alone. It is essentially asking deep questions about existence and examining them within your own awareness.

At its heart, spiritual enquiry asks questions such as:

- Who am I?
- What is the nature of consciousness?
- What is ultimate reality?
- Is there something deeper than the body and mind?
- What is the source of awareness itself?

Instead of accepting philosophical or religious answers immediately, the seeker looks inward and examines their own experience.

## How is it Practised?

Spiritual enquiry can involve several approaches:

Self-reflection - observing thoughts feelings and the sense of 'I'.

Meditation - quieting the mind to examine awareness directly.

Questioning assumptions - asking whether what we take to be 'self' is permanent or independent.

Philosophical study - reading texts that explore consciousness and reality.

## Self-enquiry in Advaita Vedanta

In the Advaita tradition (for example, taught by Ramana Maharshi), spiritual enquiry centers on the question, Who am I?

The practitioner repeatedly investigates the sense of 'I' and notices that :

- the body is observed
- thoughts are observed
- emotions are observed

Since these are observed, the enquiry asks, Who is the observer?

The goal is direct realisation of the underlying awareness (Ātman), which Advaita says is identical with Brahman, the ultimate reality.

Spiritual enquiry is essentially:

*A disciplined search for the truth about oneself and reality through direct investigation of consciousness.*

ChatGPT (AI)



## Books Available

The Sanskrit Faculty have a number of books that have been bequeathed or gifted by students. These books are all highly recommended books suitable for your personal study. If you would like to obtain one of these books please email Elaine Kearney - elainek@orcon.net.nz.

1. Conversations with Mahārāja Śrī Śāntānanda Sarasvatī (*Hardback bound SPES*)  
*Volume 1 (1965, 67, 71)*  
*Volume 3 (1978, 80, 82, 85)*
2. Teachings of His Holiness Shantananda Saraswati (*The Study Society*)  
*A Selection (Red book)*  
*A Selection II (Green book)*
3. The Teaching of Reality (*Trans. Warwick Jessup*)
4. Self Discovery (*Trans. Warwick and Elena Jessup*)
5. Search for Reality (*Trans. Warwick and Elena Jessup*)
6. Reflections on Brahman (*Trans. SPP Sydney*)
7. MacLaren Lectures (*Vols 1 – 5, complete set*)

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The School bookshop has a wide range of books available for sale, all highly relevant to your philosophical enquiries. When so much reading is available in two dimensional digital format the three dimensional format of a 'real' book is tactile good company and can be a beautiful addition to your home.

Study of good books, of any dimension, can lead to experience of realms beyond dimension. What are you studying at present? What text is supporting your spiritual enquiry on a daily basis?

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The school also has a large collection of books in the 'Book Corner', under the stairs at 268. These books have been gifted to the school, cover a wide range of topics and are available to you for a donation.

If you have books you no longer need that are relevant to the work of the school and potentially of interest to other students, you could consider donating them to the school. If so please contact Elaine Kearney.

## Worry or Wonder

Is it a rope, or is it a snake? Well, according to Ella it's definitely a rope and, apart from controlling one's feet, there is NOTHING to worry about....! Again and again, we are given this analogy - most beautifully in Ādi Śaṅkara's hymn, see the third verse below.

In this verse, the option each of us has, every moment of every day, is to rest in the wonder of the 'Supreme Puruṣa' OR worry about what the snake will do. Why do we find this option so difficult?

People who are four years old don't find it difficult at all. Their lives are filled with wonder and love. So, is that the difference? Are our hearts too engrossed in the accumulation of a lifetime's 'knowledge', hopes and fears, likes and dislikes, ego?

The world of AI forges ahead – if you are around 25 years old in Palo Alto your day, and probably much of your night, is spent shackled to the race for Artificial General Intelligence, never mind the ethics of uncontrolled global repercussions. But no one mentions humanity, love, wonder. Companies, such as Palantir, can manipulate vast pools of data for good and evil: show the specific needs during a pandemic, versus exterminating people via their mobile phones. Such power, we are pawns, we are powerless.

Yet thanks to His Holiness and the vast wealth of knowledge and love we are given by attending the School that originates from the deep source of all knowledge rooted in the Vedā, we DO have the strength to take the option of wonder and love. Don't delay, live and love NOW!

### Remembering the Self at Dawn by Ādi Śaṅkara

1) In the early morning I remember the pure essence of the Ātman shining in my heart, which is existence-consciousness-bliss, the Supreme Haṁsa (the pure white swan) that takes the mind to turiya which illumines the three states of dream, waking and deep sleep. I am that Brahman, which is without any division, and not this body which is merely a collection of five elements.

2) In the early morning I worship That Self, which is beyond mind and speech, but by whose grace all speech shines. Who is expressed in the scriptures by the statement 'Not this, Not this', since it cannot be adequately expressed by words. Who is called the God of gods, Unborn, Imperishable and Primordial.

3) In the early morning I salute That, which is the nature of supreme illumination beyond all darkness. Which is full, which is the everlasting abode and which is called the Supreme Puruṣa. In whom this endless world is settled endlessly. In whom this endless world appears like a snake on a rope.



Sue Andreassen

## Unravelling Creativity

What is creativity?

The use of imagination or an original idea to create something: inventiveness.

Setting a task.....A job started is half finished. This unique process of bringing something from the unmanifest to the surface as a three dimensional object is a complex process. By seeing the object in mind, visualising it and carefully working through the stages required to bring this seen object to fruition one can witness the powerful workings and good use of the mind, a great tool used well.

Coupled with this is the ability one needs to physically bring the said piece into existence as a three dimensional object. By employing mindfulness and other tools offered throughout the School the true author in this process is apparent .... and results can be obtained. Meditation being the master key and silent guide in all situations.



In combination with these processes is the practice, skills acquired over many years to perfect one's craft, and a steady dedicated love of the work. Also asking oneself ...Who is the doer of action in all this.? A man or a woman who works with their hands is truly free.

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The complex part of the creative jewelry craft is that a large part of the work is done under 800 degrees of heat and that is where the transforming takes place and also the place where the attention must be paramount, or complete loss of all one's work is possible.

*Attention goes all the way..... (MacLaren Lectures Nov. 1989)*

All in all it is a symphony, a combination of past skills integrated with numerous techniques we have practiced over the years in the School of Philosophy. The outcome is the experience of true joy and a deep feeling of contentment.

Geoff Taylor



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Make your interests gradually wider and more impersonal, until bit by bit the walls of the ego recede, and your life becomes increasingly merged in the universal life.

An individual human existence should be like a river — small at first, narrowly contained within its banks, and rushing passionately past rocks and over waterfalls.

Gradually the river grows wider, the banks recede, the waters flow more quietly, and in the end, without any visible break, they become merged in the sea, and painlessly lose their individual being.

*Bertrand Russell*

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The desire for Truth is like a river, like the river Ganges. She starts somewhere with a small beginning, facing all sorts of high mountains which hold her up; but she fills up and flows over them, intertwines around them for nearly two hundred miles of high, low and deep mountainous ranges, and she finds her way to the ocean to which she belongs.

*Conversations 78:4.4*

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## Respect for Those Who Cannot See

I attended a very moving presentation a few months ago.

Recently retired as the Director of Blind Low Vision New Zealand, Chris Orr described the early days of the Parnell Jubilee building and life in The Foundation for the Blind, later to become The Royal Foundation of the Blind, that change of preposition saying so much about how the attitude to blind people has changed.



“Life has never been better for blind people now, in the history of the world”.

This was Chris’ opening sentence. When the Jubilee Institute for the Blind was formed back in the 1890s, people were brought to the Blind Institute as inmates – they had no say in their destiny, it was all decided by the Institute, ie ‘for the blind’ not ‘of the blind’. The Jubilee Building, designed by Edward Bartley, was completed in 1909.

It was perceived that blind people were helpless and could not look after themselves. There were men and women hostels around the Jubilee building and workhouses where they made beautiful cane-work and crafts which were then sold. Blind people were even given a side entrance to the Jubilee building as they were considered too disabled to be seen.

The Institute was renamed The NZ Foundation for the Blind in the 1950’s and it began to be accepted that blind people could lead their own lives and follow their destinies. In 1973 it became The Royal NZ Foundation for the Blind, and finally in 1980 it became The Royal NZ Foundation OF the Blind. Today the organisation is known as Blind Low Vision NZ.

Chris had a traumatic injury leaving him blind as a young man. He was one of the first residents at Homai School for the Blind where, at last, blind people were helped to become self-sufficient. He described arriving at the school and being told

he would be shown once where things were and how to make a cup of tea, for instance, and from then on it would be up to him – a pretty terrifying approach for someone who cannot see but one that led to his self-sufficiency and development. Later he operated the telephone system at the Jubilee Building and he has gone on to live a full and active life.

He says, "Yes, tragedy robbed me of my eyesight but in so many other ways it has opened my eyes and allowed me to contribute much more to society."

He described how all one's senses become very developed, especially hearing and touch. Unbelievably, he won the Silver Medal for downhill skiing at the 1984 Innsbruck Para-Olympics and described how his sighted partner would ski ahead and tell him when to turn, but the sound of that partner's skis as they gripped the snow as they turned told him so much more.

Also, he described the moment when he was on the stadium receiving the silver medal for New Zealand as his fifth proudest moment, after marrying his wife and the birth of his three children.



Chris & Noble

As well as today's complete change in attitude to blind people, Chris emphasised the enormous benefits given by both braille and guide dogs.

Of the former, he said 2024 was the 200th anniversary of Louis Braille who developed the system. However, back in 1824, the Paris Institute for the Blind would not allow it to be taught, so Braille conducted night classes...! This magnificent gift of literacy to blind people is life-changing. Guide dogs, too, have made an enormous difference. Noble, a shiny black labrador, is Chris' fifth guide dog who was obviously devoted to looking after his master.



Sue Andreassen

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Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not. (*Jeremiah 5.21*)

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There are none so deaf [blind] as those who will not hear [see]. (*Proverb*)

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## Australasian Sanskrit Week

In January the 36th Australasian Sanskrit week was held in Wellington. The event was presented by Mrs Dianne Kruger, head of Australasian Sanskrit, who chaired the week with love, humour and patience. Also attending were the leaders of the Sanskrit faculties in each of the Australasian schools. The intellectual heft present was humbling to experience.

Mr Lambie sent a message to the assembly. He spoke of Ayodhya, the invincible city where the Self dwells and invited us to transform Wellington into another Ayodhya.

For the duration of the week I do believe we succeeded.

Each of the 41 students attending from the schools in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Wellington and Auckland, received a beautiful 35 page A4 booklet with a word by word grammatical analysis of the two verses for study from the Kena Upaniṣad (II.3,4) and Śaṅkara's commentary. We were presented each day with one of the seven steps to wisdom commencing with Good Impulse (śubhecchā) and concluding with Union (turīya), a wonderful pathway.

For me, the evening zoom meeting with Rev. Dr Thompson from the School in England was the highlight, a man who Mrs Kruger described as a font of Sanskrit knowledge. Students were requested to prepare questions in advance of the meeting and I managed to note just some of the answers as follows.

- The Upaniṣad is the Guru, it has the power to transform the reader. The final truth cannot be left to inference, it is a revelation, to transform that which is in your heart already.



- You come to full consciousness through study, it removes the darkness of ignorance and the light is revealed. The laws of grammar reflect the laws of creation and the kāraka sutras reflect that. You are in the substance of the present moment.
- The Self is indicated by the very cognitions themselves (Kena II.4). I and The Father are one, this Ātman is Brahman.
- Dhātus are seeds not roots, the pratyaya transforms the seed and brings it forth. That dynamic relationship exists in all these seeds.
- We are the word, made flesh. Obedience to the Absolute.
- When investigating a word we have to reject the meanings that do not fit the context. We let go the subject and object, which is what the Upaniṣads are saying, and be one.
- Dr Thompson spoke of the mātṛkā, causal sounds measuring out vidyā, knowledge, stemming from the divine seed. They manifest as śakti, powers in the being.



Why did I attend the week? The Wellington venue was close, compared to the Perth venue last year, mid-January was a convenient time and, importantly, this was an opportunity to learn and practice the accurate sounding of Sanskrit. We are repeatedly reminded of the profound importance of accurate and precise sounding of Sanskrit and Mrs Kruger is an excellent teacher. Chanting the śruti as a group was most enriching.

The Rev. Dr Thompson revealed to us the means to transcend from the course to the fine - to Self-Realisation. There in Ayodhya, through Sanskrit and the Upaniṣads it can be done with patience, effort and faith.

I encourage students to attend the 37th Australasian Sanskrit week to be held in Sydney 7-15 January next year.



Martin van Zonneveld

# The Magnificent Illusion

## Book Review

### **Matter - The Magnificent Illusion (Guido Tonelli, 2023)**

This prize-winning physicist presents a detailed analysis of the scientific investigation into the illusion of matter. Despite being aimed at a broad public audience the book is a challenging read, delving deep into the world of sub-atomic particles and quantum concepts, while in the process revealing outstanding insights and understandings that, in philosophic language, are more 'subtle' than 'gross', even approaching 'causal'.

With apologies to the author for inaccuracies in what follows, this is an attempt to précis some of the remarkable conclusions of the book, mostly using the author's words. You may recognise many parallels with the Vedantic Teaching to which we are blessed to have such direct access. The language of Physicists is different to the language of Philosophers; without a single mention of consciousness in the book the understandings of the two groups are merging ever closer.

A fundamental law of physics states that in a chemical reaction the sum of the reagents must equal the sum of the products. Thus, the Big Bang idea that the entire universe was born in an instant from nothing is paradoxical, echoing the Greek thinker Empedocles from fifth century BCE, 'nothing comes from nothing'.



To the question of what does give birth to the universe produced by the Big Bang contemporary physics replies: the void, otherwise known as the vacuum.

*Compare: आकाश (ākāśa, space) is.... without form and we infer it from sound and space, which is usually known as void. Within the realm of these elements [ वायु (vāyu, air) and आकाश ] empirical verification ends.*

*Conversations 87:4.2*

*In the beginning this was Existence alone, One only, without a second.*

*Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.2.1*

Tonelli explains the reasoning for his statement. The vacuum state of a material is defined as having minimal, ideally, zero, energy. But saying that inside the vacuum there is no energy is not the same as saying that inside the vacuum there is nothing. We cannot create a perfect vacuum. The vacuum created would still be occupied by

a few remaining molecules and penetrated by material substances including the gravitational field and the elusive Higgs field (see later).

The vacuum achieved is not nothingness but is full of hidden silent activities.

Even the vacuum must obey the Heisenberg uncertainty principle of quantum mechanics which states that, at the quantum level there is a limit to the precision with which position and momentum can be simultaneously known. Defining the present position of a particle means its movement over time is unknown and vice versa. Is it a particle or a field? The vacuum is therefore prohibited from having a set of microscopic states permanently at zero energy. It must be full of fluctuations, a particle-antiparticle pair can appear and then be immediately reabsorbed, to become a field! The vacuum is bubbling away. Thanks to this mechanism, this infinitesimal fluctuation of the vacuum can fill up with what are called 'Inflations' and give birth to a material universe. This proposal, still to be verified experimentally, is that this scalar particle, called the 'Inflation', is responsible for the paroxysmal cosmic swelling of the universe, the mysterious initial Big Bang.

All the measurements carried out up until today to better understand the origin of the universe favour this inflationary model. This is the phase during which a quantum fluctuation gives rise to a tiny bubble of space-time which fills with a handful of Inflations. There is speculation that the Inflation particle is possibly the recently discovered Higgs boson particle, the extremely elusive particle or field that is supposed to magically lend the quality of mass to all other particles.



*Compare: 'Pure consciousness is of the nature of the smallest particle which covers the whole creation at the same time.'*

*Conversations 65:11.11*

If the universe arises from vacuum, what is it? Tonelli states that the entire material universe is considered to consist of two essential ingredients combined, mass-energy and space-time.

Mass-energy is the sum of all matter considered as energy, theoretically calculated according to Einstein's equation  $E = mc^2$ .

The space-time element is an enormous material structure, not an abstract concept. It contains fields, including the electromagnetic field which allows us to communicate and the gravitational field which keeps us attached to the ground and contains the vast quantity of mass-energy. It is a structure that can vibrate, oscillate and transmit energy across great distances through gravitational waves.

*Compare: the marking of time – the measuring of it is by the vibration of  
ॐ.... But the ॐ represents the ever present Self. It is only when it starts to  
vibrate that one event passes into another.*

*MacLaren Lectures 1979*

Einstein's general relativity theory demonstrates that mass-energy, considered as an active material substance, curves space-time. Since space-time is warped due to the local presence of a concentration of mass-energy, matter such as a planet, this produces a gravitational attraction between any two bodies. We can imagine matter to be impregnated by a form of binding energy holding two bodies together.

On a small scale, consider the energy required just to separate a rocket or satellite from the earth's gravitational force of attraction. On a much larger scale, as everything is attracted by everything, the sum of energy that keeps the stars, the galaxies and the clusters of galaxies together is an enormous number.

The understanding presented by Tonelli is that the net sum of these two gigantic numbers, the total positive mass-energy ( $E = mc^2$ ) and the total negative energy of space-time gives a surprising result. **The total energy of the universe is zero.**

*A universe of this nature can expand to infinity and last for eternity  
because its dynamic does not require any expenditure of energy.*

As the nett energy of the universe is zero the conclusion drawn by the scientist is that **the universe is also a vacuum.**

The world of material objects - our bodies, houses, mountains, the planets – is an illusion.

The material universe was born out of the vacuum thanks to quantum fluctuations and remains a vacuum. The Big Bang was a noisy transformation of one state of vacuum into another equivalent state of vacuum with no need for an immense source of initial input energy.

Maybe some of the great Greek thinkers already intuitively understood this conclusion. Tonelli quotes the words of Plato:

*Anyway, time came into being along with the heavens so that having been generated simultaneously, they would also be dissolved simultaneously if they were ever dissolved.*

*Timaeus. (Trans. D Horan)*

A concluding statement from the author summarises the wonder of the discoveries outlined.

*Our material world is made of vacuum. The conclusion that science has reached is a bit of a joke. While trying to find something solid and material on which to base an explanation of everything, we've found ourselves removing any reassuring substance from the entire material world...*

The question and 'bit of a joke' perplexing the physicist is answered by Mahārāja Śrī Vāsudevānanda Sarasvatī:

*The expansion of matter is vyatireka. The contracting of matter is anvaya. What is matter here? The Absolute is matter. The expansion of the Absolute is this world.*

*Conversations 15:3.1*

Lawrence Ames



To become a master of oneself is first to take radical and complete responsibility for your life. This includes even that which is beyond your control. A true master knows that it is not what happens, but the way one responds, that determines the outcome.

*The Mountain is You (B Wiest)*

There is no clash between the world and the Absolute and one can become the master of the world and a companion of the Self simultaneously.

*Conversations 78:1.4*

## Speak the Truth

**Speak the truth. Speak pleasant truths. Do not speak untruths.**

During our wonderful travels in Vietnam last December an aspect popped out more than it usually does. Albeit I, not often enough, have a conscious awareness of the Atman in all of us, the 'local' language, communication styles, respect, culture, belief systems, environment, foods, rules, etiquette, laws and so on (to name a few) posed an even greater awareness of seeking to get the best out of speaking pleasant truths.

Fortunately, I am happy to state that speaking untruths has never been a theme of any substance in my life, thanks to a solid upbringing. So that ticks that one off.

I was born and raised in South Africa where culturally, one is prone, often encouraged, to 'simply say it like it is' and 'don't muck about, just get to the point quickly even with brutal honesty'. Emigrating to NZ, for all its familiarities with South Africa, heightened my awareness of 'being too direct.' So, my Vietnam trip, in this sense, was nothing new to me.



The lovely family we stayed with is Buddhist. Indeed, most of the population are either Buddhist, Taoist, or Confucianist.

I thought then, to maximise my success rate in not causing offence but getting across my communications in a way that is understood, a better grasp of Buddhism, contrasted with other systems for context on this specific component, would be a good idea. My intention was not to just 'get it right', I genuinely like and respect the folk we were with. This was from my heart.

### Some examples:

Food: when eating various blood 'puddings', filled intestines, having heaps of food placed in my bowl (yes, I put on a couple of kg's) - dilemma: at what point does one politely say 'no thank you' without causing offense? Note: I loved 99% of the food. Some of it was just a slight shock to the system.

Alcohol: Especially offered (including at a breakfast once!) Vietnamese whisky by a few older, retired, ex senior ranking government male officials, accompanied with their relevant "this is our custom in Vietnam". I simply took these to mean "I want you to enjoy our hospitality." Which I did.

Whilst the below is a very brief and high level summary of my cursory investigations, I totally acknowledge that I am not an expert in this field in any manner whatsoever, my readings were from less than a miniscule of material and that my interpretations could be entirely wrong. Nevertheless, I gave it a go, really enjoyed it. I am happy to be enlightened further.

I decided to contrast Advaita with Buddhism, Kant, and 'modern' views/ethics.

### Similarities

| Principle                    | Philosophy                                                    |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Truth matters morally        | All 4 i.e. Advaita, Buddhism, Kant, and 'modern' views/ethics |
| Moral discipline is required | All 4 i.e. Advaita, Buddhism, Kant, and 'modern' views/ethics |
| Speech can cause harm        | Advaita, Buddhism, and modern ethics                          |
| Intention matters            | Buddhism and virtue ethics                                    |

### Major Differences

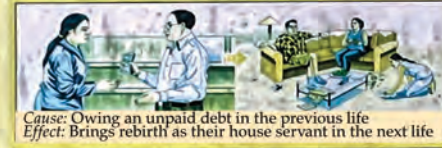
| Principle          | Philosophy                                                                                                            |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Is truth absolute? | Only Kant appears to state a clear 'yes' even if it creates harm. The others vary between 'required' and 'contextual' |
| Is harm relevant?  | In Kant's case, it is a 'no'. The others vary between yes and or its central                                          |
| Is silence better? | All but Kant, who states 'no,' vary between yes and often.                                                            |

### The Core Divide Appears to Be:

| Eastern Traditions (Advaita & Buddhism)                                                                                                    | Kant                                                                                                                  | Modern Philosophy                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Truth must be integrated with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compassion</li> <li>Wisdom</li> <li>Spiritual development</li> </ul> | Truth is a duty independent of outcomes.                                                                              | Truth is evaluated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harm</li> <li>Rights</li> <li>Social consequences</li> </ul> Relativism and flexibility exist in varying degrees. |
| Brutal honesty is rejected.                                                                                                                | Rejects both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compassion-based lying</li> <li>Harm-based exceptions</li> </ul> | It seems, to me, that brutal honesty, at the very least is not desired.                                                                                                         |

# TRANH NHÂN QUẢ 1A

## The illustrations of The Law of Cause and Effect



This poster and the theme of 'cause and effect' were evident in many Pagodas in Vietnam. The pictures illustrate the cause and effect of various behaviours.

This image in our host's home is common in many homes, it highlights the principles of practising good dharma, buddhi etc.



I set off on the '500 step walk' which culminated at a beautiful panoramic view of the surrounding area. Dominant features included various ancient Chinese and Buddhist structures, sculptures and writings - themed at remembering to practice good principles and morals, amongst other aspects.

The walk was fine by the way - hot and sweaty but very enjoyable indeed.

### So, what does that mean for me?

Giving due attention to compassion, wisdom, and spiritual development, together with a common sense/reasonable approach, I reject brutal honesty in principle, however, in a contextual situation, if wisdom and or raw instinct dictates that brutal honesty is required I will, in the last resort, act accordingly.

How did I in fact act in the above examples? After a good measure of experience, observation, and some discussion, I took a measured approach in politely declining. It appeared to be well received by all. As simple as that!

What a wonderful experience.

John Mozzessohn



Ninh Nhât - during my 500 step walk

## Reflections in Renaissance Italy

At the height of last European summer Bruce and I were invited to the International Heads' and Teachers' Conference near Lucca as guests of The Education Renaissance Trust.

We landed in Italy via Pisa, where we could only marvel at the magnificent architecture and drink in the beauty from the outside, for in the stifling heat we had to abandon even the thought of joining the seemingly endless queues of the waiting tourists. On leaving Pisa, at the huge busy train station we came across, as in so many films famously portrayed, a trace of Italian volatility of some relationships. A very attractive young lady was volubly hectoring her man, fully choreographed with graceful gestures for emphasis for the obvious delight of the waiting passengers right across the twelve platforms. The entertainment soon ended with loud cheering at their very obvious reconciliation.



Our next stop was Florence, where it seemed to be even hotter, and each queue much longer, however after our exhausting, but fruitful "Hop on Hop off " tours, we stumbled upon a private gallery in a rather nondescript building. It was beautifully restored, having been originally built in the late fifteenth century. The guide had explained how the building was so structured, that it could be cooled with those magnificent shutters we admired, to establish airflows either one or another way, taking advantage of the direction of the wind, and similarly in the winter how the layout of the rooms allowed the central area to retain the heat of the huge fireplaces, as at the time of the construction glazing was in its infancy and far too expensive!



Thus we could peruse the gallery's collection in cool comfort and since there were only a few of us, the guide was only too pleased to answer our questions. We were most fortunate to thus drink deep at the fountain of art and craft of yesteryears.

The conference was held at Villa Boccella, a magical place, situated on fifty acres of gentle slopes

above the riverside town of Ponte a Moriano. The main villa itself was built after the Renaissance period, at the end of sixteen hundreds, but several significant changes (a long Belvedere balcony built) were made in the eighteen hundreds by the then owners, the Boccella family. These hills were originally wild oak forest, but were now proudly displaying many varieties of pines and conifers.

To quote from Dave Cullinan's comprehensive book on the property's past present and future, aptly titled: "Time at Villa Boccella":



*"In the year two thousand, Valerie and Alan Marshall took on the challenge of the Villa Boccella. ... Their ambitious project was to provide an environment where scholars, students, groups and individuals could come and enlighten themselves and others in ways to make the world a better place. ...*

*"The reconstruction project was enormous, as none of the buildings were habitable, and many were dilapidated agricultural barns. A magnificent team of local specialists, engineers, surveyors, artisans, technicians and builders were chosen, and the works began. ...Valerie guided the works through to its completion. The fifty acre estate is now a dream come true, thanks to her untiring attention to detail, foresight and her passion and love of architecture and gardens."*

Thus we were royally accommodated, could enjoy the tasty produce from the orchards or gardens, either in their fresh state, or as preserves from previous seasons. The catering was carried out largely both by the current pupils or



alumnae of St. James Senior Girls' School. We were greeted every morning by wonderful clear skies, but in these hot Italian summer days, siesta provided opportunities to cool off in one of the three large swimming pools.

Apart from the delicious food and the rich variety of talks, a great selection of subjects to pursue, study and immerse ourselves in, we thoroughly enjoyed the company of like minded colleagues from the UK, Ireland, South Africa, Australia and our friends from New Zealand. The theme of the week was the question: "What is Love?" To provide insight for our studies and matters arising from that there were many fruitful discussions among this diverse collection of individuals.

On our "Day Out" most of us went to Lucca. What a gem! A bustling artisan town, which sits on the Serchio river. The wall of Lucca encloses the historical centre and is absolutely perfect for bicycle rides along its entire course. In fact after walking most of the day to view its marvels, getting lost, stumbling on further surprises, we hired bikes to ride on the tree lined wall, often dodging other vehicles for while it was wide enough for two way vehicular traffic, plus pedestrians, everyone drove with gay abandon, non observant of left or right hand drives! The ride had an added bonus to the relief felt for our sore feet; it proved to be a most efficient means of "air-conditioning" system on a very hot day.



The present "curtain wall" also stems from the Renaissance, was finished in 1646 and marks the fourth wall of Lucca. Navigating its narrow streets opening into beautiful, wide piazzas would by itself entertain many maze enthusiast, but apart from its quirky layout, the many beautiful architectural marvels and hidden little parks and gardens delight all pedestrian, locals and visitors alike.

We had a magnificent day in a totally absorbing, fulfilling, delightful week.

We just have to now live up to fulfilling Valerie and Alan Marshall's dream, **"... to make the world a better place."**

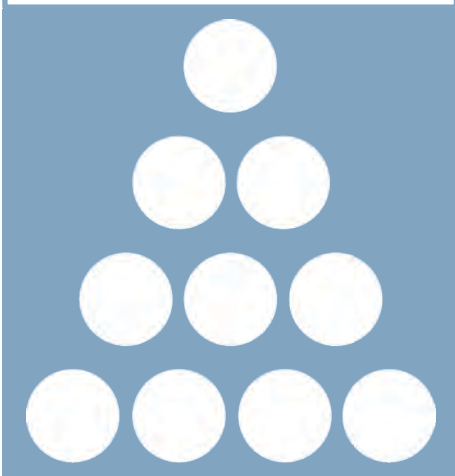
Ildiko Watson



## Awe .....

### PUZZLE

Invert the triangle by moving 3 circles.



You're just really good  
at letting go of the past!

... along with humility comes an insatiable quest which ends only in the ending of the ego. The seeker is swallowed in the seeking and we see the king of the universe.

The seeking ends in 'see-king' - the King of the universe.

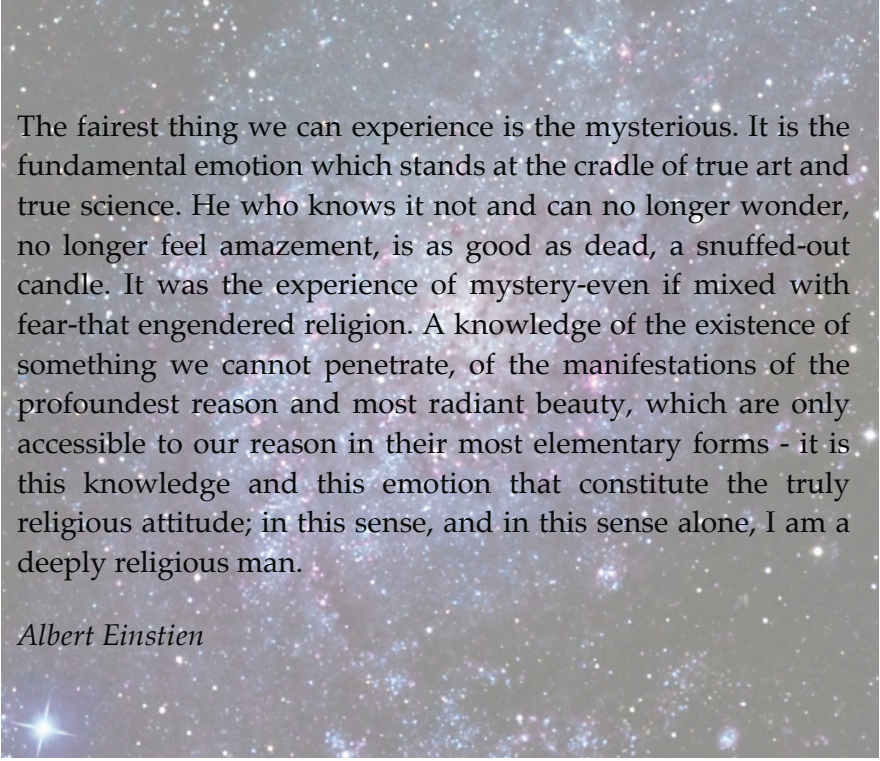
*Swami Venkatesananda (The Kingly Secret)*

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Awe is - being in the presence of something vast and mysterious that transcends your current understanding of the world.

When our default self reigns too strongly and we are too focussed on ourselves, anxiety, rumination, depression, and self-criticism can overtake us. Awe, it would seem, quiets this urgent voice of the default self. As our default self vanishes awe shifts us from a dog-eat-dog mindset to perceive that we are part of networks of more interdependent, collaborating individuals. This transformation of the self, brought about by awe, is a powerful antidote to isolation and loneliness.

*D Keltner (Awe)*

A background image of a cosmic scene, likely a nebula or a deep-space photograph, showing a vast field of stars and colorful gas clouds in shades of blue, purple, and white.

The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. It was the experience of mystery-even if mixed with fear-that engendered religion. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and most radiant beauty, which are only accessible to our reason in their most elementary forms - it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude; in this sense, and in this sense alone, I am a deeply religious man.

*Albert Einstein*

## Share Your Insights

Sincere thanks from the Editor to the students who have contributed to this issue of Vision; and strong encouragement to all students to 'put pen to paper' and record something of your enquiries, your wonder, awe and amazement for others to read in the next Vision. Without your contributions there is no Vision.

How grateful we are that the wise ones have not only spoken but their insights and experiences of the Teaching have been documented for our benefit.

Reflecting upon and writing about your philosophic insights can be therapeutic. This simple peaceful exercise can help clear false views and ideas from the heart and mind.

Contributions for further issues of Vision are most welcome.  
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School of Philosophy (Auckland) Inc

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